

**2003**

**INDIANA**

**WHIP**

**GUIDANCE**

**(v. 1.00)**

## **GENERAL PROGRAM CRITERIA**

- The maximum cost share limit that a landowner can receive through WHIP is \$25,000 per agreement. However, in instances where the participant has a Wildlife Habitat Development Plan with exceptional benefits to wildlife, the State Conservationist can authorize additional WHIP funds over the \$25,000 limitation.
- Any financial assistance funds received in the state will be divided into two groups. Seventy five percent of the funds will go to private landowners. The other 25 percent will go to government and Not for Profit (NFP) groups. If there is unobligated money in either of the two groups after a set deadline (This deadline will be determined once funding is received), the money can be used to fund remaining applications in either group.
- Other non-NRCS funding sources can be used to supplement the 75% NRCS cost share. Other non-NRCS funding sources can include other federal and state agency programs, as long as those sources permit it. Note that total funding can not exceed 100% of the cost of the practice.
- Contracts are typically agreements that are 5 to 10 years in length. Note that, ALL components of the contract must be completed as least 2 years prior to the end of the contract.
- Land enrolled in Federal conservation programs such as CRP, WRP, and the EWP Floodplain Easement Program are not eligible for WHIP funding.
- Practices awarded points shall meet NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) Standards and Specifications. In addition, all practices will be subject to the limitations and guidelines as described in "Criteria for Practice Eligibility".
- All Wildlife Habitat Development Plans (WHDP) will be signed by an IDNR District Wildlife Biologist or their designate. The WHDP will identify the target wildlife species, and the habitat development and management needs of that species.
- Existing practices or practices that are in the process of being installed, even if they meet FOTG standards, are not eligible to receive points.
- Any practice initiated before cost-share agreement approval is ineligible for financial assistance. However, the State Conservationist may waive this provision when **all** of the following conditions are met:
  - The applicant filed a WHIP application before initiating the practice;
  - The practice is established in accordance with NRCS standards and specifications;
  - The practice is included in the wildlife habitat development plan; and
  - The applicant understands that the practice is ineligible for cost-share assistance if the agreement is not approved.
- All practices awarded points shall be planned in the contract when a participant's application is accepted. Units planned shall be consistent with the units for which points were awarded.
- Planting fescue for any practice is not eligible for points or cost-share.
- Practices on the ranking criteria with maximum units specified are limited both in cost-share and points according to the maximum listed.

- Practice life spans for WHIP are the same as those listed in the National EQIP manual. Practice life spans for practices not listed in the EQIP manual will be for the life of the contract.
- “Protected Conservation Areas” include: Federal/State wildlife refuges, forests, parks and nature preserves; lands protected by The Nature Conservancy; or other lands protected by a minimum 30 year easement with wildlife management as its primary purpose. Classified Wildlife and Classified Forest areas are not deed-restrictive easements, and therefore not considered protected conservation areas.

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## **CRITERIA FOR PRACTICE ELIGIBILITY**

### **1. Contour Buffer (332)**

- Contour Buffers will be established according to the FOTG Standard 332 - *Contour Buffer*.
- After establishment, contour buffers:
  - ⇒ Will not be mowed more than once a year.
  - ⇒ Must be mowed at least once during the contract period to prevent woody encroachment.
  - ⇒ Will not have more than ¼ of the area mowed in any one year.
  - ⇒ Will not be mowed during the primary ground-nesting season of March 1 through July 15th.
  - ⇒ Will be mowed to a minimum height of 6 inches for Cool Season Grass (CSG) plantings, and to a minimum height of 8 inches for Warm Season Grass (WSG) plantings. A 12” minimum winter height must also be maintained.

### **2. Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647)**

- Early Successional Habitat Development/Management practices will be established according to the FOTG Standard 647 - *Early Successional Habitat Development/Management*.
- Points or cost-share will not be awarded for fields that contain greater than 20% fescue. This limitation is intended to encourage **conversion** of fescue fields, rather than to just apply a disturbance practice.
- Points or cost share will not be awarded for strip mowing or strip disking of filter strips, riparian buffers, field borders, waterways, wildlife corridors, or any areas planted to woody vegetation.
- Points or cost-share will not be awarded on lands being grazed or used for hay production.
- Points will be awarded for recurring practices such as strip disking, strip mowing and prescribed burning if needed for success of the practice, is conducted during the contract period, and included in the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan. For example, if a 10-acre field is scheduled to be burned 3 times under a 10 year contract, points can be awarded for 30 acres (10 acres times 3 burns). The amount of cost-share would then be based on 30 acres.
- **Prescribed Burning** will be completed according to the FOTG Standard 338 - *Prescribed Burning*.
  - ⇒ Land enrolled in CRP is not eligible for WHIP funding.
  - ⇒ Riparian forest buffers are not eligible for prescribed burning.
  - ⇒ Points may be awarded for prescribed burning of hayland containing WSG.

- ⇒ Fields are eligible for cost share for Prescribed Burning only once every three years on the same acreage during the contract period. Points can be awarded for each time the acreage is burned if burning is conducted during the contract period. **Points will not be awarded in situations where fire is used as an establishment tool such as to remove excess vegetation for planting.**
- ⇒ A copy of the prescribed burn plan must be present before the burning takes place. Cost share will not be paid for burning without a prescribed burning plan.
- ⇒ **NOTE: NRCS employees are not authorized to write burn plans or assist with igniting or spreading of fire for private landowners. The NRCS State Forester will be contacted before installing this practice.**

### 3. Fence (382)

- Livestock shall be excluded according to the FOTG Standard 382 - *Fence*.
- Cost-share and points are only eligible for fencing of streams, woodland, wetlands, wildlife lands, and hayland where livestock are permanently excluded. Fencing of pastureland is not eligible for WHIP funding.
- WHIP eligibility for fencing is limited to operations where livestock are present during the evaluation period or have been present within the past 12 months.
- When a woodland to be fenced also contains a stream or wetland, do not award points on both criteria. Points will be awarded based on the criteria item that allows the most points.
- Fencing streams and wetlands requires a minimum setback or buffer area of 33 feet from the top of the bank of streams or edge of wetland area.
- Fencing a woodland requires a minimum setback or buffer area of 33 feet from the drip line.
- Cost-sharing for temporary fencing is not allowed.

### 4. Field Border (386)

- Field Borders will be established according to the FOTG Standard 386 - *Field Border*.
- Note that:
  - ⇒ The 175 point mix consists of 3 WSG + 1 legume + □ lb. of forbs (min. of 4 forb species).
  - ⇒ The 200 point mix consists of 4 WSG (min.) + 1 legume + ½ lb. of forbs (min. of 5 forb species).
- Because the primary purpose of this practice is to provide a wildlife habitat, the minimum width of the Filter Border will be 33 feet.
- Livestock shall be excluded according to the FOTG Standard 382 - *Fence*.
- Points will only be awarded for this practice when the management of the field border is different than the remainder of the field.
- After establishment, *vegetative* field borders:
  - ⇒ Will not be mowed more than once a year.
  - ⇒ Must be mowed at least once during the contract period to prevent woody encroachment.
  - ⇒ Will not have more than ¼ of the area mowed in any one year.
  - ⇒ Will not be mowed during the primary ground-nesting season of March 1 through July 15th.
  - ⇒ Will be mowed to a minimum height of 6 inches for CSG plantings, and to a minimum height of 8 inches for WSG plantings. A 12" minimum winter height must also be maintained.

## 5. Field Windbreak (392)

- Field Windbreaks practices will follow the **establishment procedures and spacing** in FOTG Standard 392 - *Field Windbreaks*.
- FOTG Standard 645 – *Upland Wildlife Habitat Management* will be used to determine **tree and shrub species**.
- Because the primary purpose of this practice is to provide a wildlife habitat, the minimum number of rows will be four. At least one row will be a shrub and one row will be a hard mast tree species.
- The minimum width will be 50 feet when the primary purpose of the field windbreak is to provide a **wildlife corridor**.

## 6. Filter Strip (393)

- Filter Strips will be established according to the FOTG Standard 393 - *Filter Strip*.
- Because the primary purpose of this practice is to provide a wildlife habitat, the minimum width of the Filter Strip will be 33 feet.
- Filter Strip establishment by natural regeneration is not permitted for purposes of assigning points or cost-share.
- Livestock shall be excluded according to the FOTG Standard 382 - *Fence*.
- After establishment, *vegetative* filter strips:
  - ⇒ Will not be mowed more than once a year.
  - ⇒ Must be mowed at least once during the contract period to prevent woody encroachment.
  - ⇒ Will not have more than ¼ of the area mowed in any one year.
  - ⇒ Will not be mowed during the primary nesting season of March 1 through July 15th.
  - ⇒ Will be mowed to a minimum height of 6 inches for CSG plantings, and to a minimum height of 8 inches for WSG plantings. A 12” minimum winter height must also be maintained.

## 7. Fish Stream Improvement (395)

- Fish Stream Improvements will be established according to the FOTG Standard 395 - *Fish Stream Improvement*.
- It is highly recommended that the District Fisheries Biologist concurs with the implementation of this standard.

## 8. Hedgerow Planting (422)

- Hedgerow Plantings will be established according to the FOTG Standard 422 - *Hedgerow Planting*.

## 9. Mine Shaft and Adit Closing (457)

- Mine and cave gate closings will be established according to the FOTG Standard 457 - *Mine Shaft and Adit Closing*.
- This standard will only be used to install bat friendly gating of vertical and horizontal underground openings, to protect bat hibernation sites, and to close openings for human safety while maintaining access for wildlife species.
- **NOTE: The NRCS State Biologist will be contacted before proceeding with this practice.**

## **10. Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats (643)**

- Plans will be established according to the FOTG Standard 643 - *Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats*.

## **11. Riparian Forest Buffer (391)**

- Riparian Forest Buffers will be established according to the FOTG Standard 391 - *Riparian Forest Buffer*.
- Natural regeneration of riparian buffers is not permitted for purposes of assigning points or cost-share.
- The planting will be considered successful if a minimum stocking rate of 300 trees per acres is achieved after 3 years.
- Inclusion of seedlings from natural regeneration is allowable when determining planting success.
- Livestock shall be excluded with a fence according to the FOTG Standard 382 - *Fence*.
- Only sites adjacent to *perennial* streams will be eligible for WHIP funding.
- After establishment, *vegetative* components of riparian forest borders:
  - ⇒ Will not be mowed more than once a year.
  - ⇒ Must be mowed at least once during the contract period to prevent woody encroachment.
  - ⇒ Will not have more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the area mowed in any one year.
  - ⇒ Will not be mowed during the primary ground-nesting season of March 1 through July 15th.
  - ⇒ Will be mowed to a minimum height of 6 inches for CSG plantings, and to a minimum height of 8 inches for WSG plantings. A 12" minimum winter height must also be maintained.

## **12. Spring Development (574)**

- Spring Developments will be established according to the FOTG Standard 574 - *Spring Development*.
- Cost share will only be allowed where livestock will be excluded from streams or wetlands that are currently being used as a watering source for livestock.
- Cost-share for pumps is not authorized.
- Cost-share is only authorized for permanently installed tanks or waterers, and not for portable tanks/waterers or above-ground pipelines.

## **13. Streambank and Shoreline Protection (580)**

- Streambank and Shoreline Protection projects will be established according to the FOTG Standard 580 - *Streambank and Shoreline Protection*.
- To receive points for this practice, bioengineering must be done on the streambank or shoreline.
- Fencing, filter strips, and riparian forest buffers alone do not receive points under this practice.
- To apply this practice, the site visit should include both an NRCS Engineer, and an NRCS or IDNR District Biologist to help determine which practices are needed and the estimated cost of the necessary practices.
- A riparian forest buffer (391) or filter strip (393) must exist, or be installed for at least the distance that the 580 will be implemented.

- Cost share is available under Standard 580 for limited access areas when livestock are being excluded from streams or wetlands that are currently being used as a water source. Points are not authorized for limited access points only.

#### 14. Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)

- FOTG Standard 645 – *Upland Wildlife Habitat Management* **will be used to determine tree and shrub species, planting rates and spacing**, based upon the needs of the target species as identified by the District Biologist.
- To receive points for a *Bottomland Hardwood* planting, the site must have a soil that is identified in the FOTG as having a flooding frequency (any duration), and the planting specifications must contain a predominance of hard mast producing species found in Table 3d of FOTG Standard 645.
- Cost-share is authorized for mowing or herbicide treatment during the first three growing seasons after planting.

#### 15. Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)

- FOTG Standard 645 – *Upland Wildlife Habitat Management* **will be used to determine tree, shrub, and herbaceous species, planting rates and spacing**, based upon the needs of the target species as identified by the District Biologist
- Practices containing woody vegetation will follow the **site preparation, planting dates, planting stock size and planting and storage guidelines** according to the FOTG Standard 612 - *Tree/Shrub Establishment*.
- Note that:
  - ⇒ The 175 point mix consists of 3 WSG + 1 legume + □ lb. of forbs (min. of 4 forb species).
  - ⇒ The 200 point mix consists of 4 WSG (min.) + 1 legume + ½ lb. of forbs (min. of 5 forb species).
- Points will be awarded for recurring practices such as strip disking, strip mowing and prescribed burning if needed for success of the practice, is conducted during the contract period, and included in the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan. For example, if a 10-acre field is scheduled to be burned 3 times under a 10-year contract, points can be awarded for 30 acres (10 acres times 3 burns). The amount of cost-share would then be based on 30 acres.
- **Prescribed Burning** will be allowed as a cost-shared maintenance component of Upland Wildlife Habitat management and will be completed according to the FOTG Standard 338 - *Prescribed Burning*.
  - ⇒ Points may be awarded for prescribed burning of hayland containing WSG.
  - ⇒ Fields are eligible for cost share for Prescribed Burning only once every three years on the same acreage during the contract period.
  - ⇒ **Points will not be awarded in situations where fire is used as an establishment tool such as to remove excess vegetation for planting.**
  - ⇒ A copy of the prescribed burn plan must be present before the burning takes place. Cost share will not be paid for burning without a prescribed burning plan.
  - ⇒ **NOTE: NRCS employees are not authorized to write burn plans or assist with igniting or spreading of fire for private landowners. The NRCS State Forester will be contacted before installing this practice.**

**16. Wetland Creation (658)**

- Wetland Creations will be established according to the FOTG Standard 658 - *Wetland Creation*.

**17. Wetland Enhancement (659)**

- Wetland Enhancements will be established according to the FOTG Standard 659 - *Wetland Enhancement*.
- Enhancement should not significantly change the primary wetland functions provided at the site.

**18. Wetland Restoration (657)**

- Wetland Restorations will be established according to FOTG Standard 657 - *Wetland Restoration*
- Construction of nesting islands is not eligible for cost share.

**19. Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644)**

- Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management projects will be established according to the FOTG Standard 644 - *Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management*.
- Cost share is authorized for structural and vegetative components only.

**20. Shallow Water Management for Wildlife (646)**

- Shallow Water Management will be established according to the FOTG Standard 646 - *Shallow Water Development for Wildlife*.
- Note that a FOTG Standard 646 Jobsheet is available on the Indiana NRCS Biology Homepage.
- Cost share is authorized for structural and vegetative components only.

**21. Wildlife Watering Facility (648)**

- Wildlife Watering Facilities will be established according to the FOTG Standard 648 - *Wildlife Watering Facility*.
- Wildlife watering areas must be in an area protected from grazing and will not be used for livestock watering.
- Wildlife ponds must be planned at locations where water is the primary limiting factor for wildlife. An IDNR District Biologist shall make this decision.
- Synthetic or clay liners for wildlife watering holes are not eligible for cost-share.